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CBS EVENING NEWS (TV)
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FILE ONLY

Spy Satellite Problems

RATHER: Friday's failure of a big Titan rocket launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California is still getting little public comment from the Defense Department. But CBS News correspondent Eric Engberg reports tonight the Titan explosion was also a major setback for U.S. efforts to keep tabs on the Soviet with sophisticated eye-in-the-sky satellites.

ERIC ENGBERG: This time no astronauts were lost, but the spectacular launch-pad failure of the unmanned Air Force Titan-34D rocket, the second disaster for the space program in eleven weeks, raises equally grave questions for the country.

JAMES BAMFORD: This loss of the Titan missile is probably the worst blow in U.S. intelligence history.

ENGBERG: With the grounding of the shuttle, the Titan-34Ds were the only remaining way for the U.S. to launch the big superspy satellites, code named Keyhole, that take up-to-the-second photos like these of Soviet military preparations. The U.S. has only one of these satellites now in polar orbit.

PAUL STARES: If this should fail for any reason, the U.S. would be without any strategic reconnaissance, photo reconnaissance of the Soviet Union.

ENGBERG: The concern is heightened by the fact the next generation of large spy satellites cannot be flown by any vehicle except the shuttle.

REP. DAVE MCCURDY: We need the shuttle desperately. I think, with this latest incident and the explosion, we certainly are hobbled. And we cannot afford to delay.

ENGBERG: The effort to return the shuttle to flight status continued today at Cape Canaveral, where investigators began taking apart a solid rocket like the one that destroyed the Challenger. Oddly, it is also similar to the booster suspected in the Titan accident. But the complete shuttle booster redesign now required will take NASA from one to two years to complete. In the meantime, the launch pads will stand idle and the fleet will sit in its hangars, reducing America's ability to track Soviet military moves.

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